WHEN I WAS A BOY IN BELGIUM

ROBERT JONCKHEERE

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Robert Jonckheere

WHEN I WAS A BOY IN BELGIUM

BY

ROBERT JONCKHEERE

ILLUSTRATED FROM PHOTOGRAPHS

BOSTON
LOTHROP, LEE & SHEPARD CO.

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To

Mr. and Mrs. Augustus A. Hemenway

in grateful acknowledgment of many acts of kindness shown to Belgian refugees

PUBLISHERS' PREFACE

THE author of this book became known to us through the columns of a newspaper, which published an interview with Mr. Jonckheere soon after his arrival in this country.

The graphic account he had given of Belgian refugees flocking out of Antwerp led us to believe that he was one who could well and profitably tell our boys and girls how those of their own age live in a land that has become the center of so great interest.

Mr. Jonckheere proved to be a man of unusual culture, especially well-read, and an excellent linguist. After a single interview in which we explained what our young people—and older ones, too, for that matter—would be interested in knowing, he readily wrote " When I Was a Boy

in Belgium" in English, and so well that his own manuscript was speedily given to the printer.

Mr. Jonckheere has settled down courageously to start life anew in this country. All will be glad to know that he now has a reunited family. The cheerful way in which he describes Belgian child-life by giving his own true story shows convincingly how amiable are the thrifty people of that fair and unfortunate land, Belgium.

LOTHROP, LEE & SHEPARD COMPANY.

Boston, March, 1915.

CONTENTS

CHAPTER		PAGE
I.	A Little Boy in Belgium	13
II.	The Boys' School	15
III.	Ten O'Clock Playtime	17
IV.	"Jet"	21
V.	"Kalinker," Cherry-Stones, and Disks	26
VI.	Work at School	33
VII.	Holidays in Belgium	39
VIII.	Uncle Doren and His Mill	47
IX.	Grandmother	61
X.	Stories Grandmother Told Me	66
XI.	To Boarding-School at Blankenberghe	74
XII.	A Trip through Belgium	85
XIII.	My Father's Story of Waterloo	93
XIV.	A New Start in Antwerp	101
XV.	Some Business Experiences	110
XVI.	Happy Years	118
XVII.	The Outbreak of the War	124
XVIII.	Our March from Contich to Antwerp	133
XIX.	Our Flight from Antwerp	142
XX.	We Come to the United States	148

ILLUSTRATIONS

Robert Jonckheere	*Frontispiece*
	FACING PAGE
A Canal in Belgium	36
A Belgian Windmill	48
Ancient Watch-Tower and Dam at Bruges	48
A Dog-Cart in Belgium	54
Albert, King of the Belgians	78
Rear of Fortifications at Namur, showing Canal	86
Where the Battle of Waterloo was Fought	100
Antwerp Cathedral	108
A Line of Refugees	128
Wounded Belgian Soldier telling his Children of the Thrilling Fight with the Germans at Liège	134
A Soldier and his Homeless Family	140
Refugees Leaving Antwerp	146

WHEN I WAS A BOY IN BELGIUM

CHAPTER I

A LITTLE BOY IN BELGIUM

When my mother used to talk to me about my birth, she never forgot to mention how cold it was in Belgium during the early part of 1879. I was born in the month of March, that year.

I was the first baby in the house, and plenty of work attends such an event. There were pancakes and chocolate milk to be prepared for all the relatives and friends who would come to see me in the morning, to tell my mother what a fine baby I was, and how much I looked like her or my father. Before departing, each

guest would eat pancakes and drink chocolate milk in my honor.

Well, there I was, a little boy, whom everybody found really a big boy. They all said to my mother that she must be glad to have a boy, and not a little girl for her first child.

I had only to grow up quickly now so that I could soon go to school. When I was two and a half years old, I was sent, according to usual custom, to the "nuns' school." I do not remember much of that time. There I learned the alphabet and also many prayers, and became able to count up to one hundred. Playing and praying filled the best part of the day. I went to that school until I was five years old,—the age of entrance to the boys' school. Until they are five years old, little boys and girls go to the same school, but after that they go to separate schools.

CHAPTER II

THE BOYS' SCHOOL

It is a big happening in the life of a boy, that first day in the boys' school, with a schoolmaster at the head of the class and with real writing-desks for the children!

I attended the boys' school until I was eleven years old, when I had to receive my first communion. More than ninety-nine per cent. of the people living in Belgium are Roman Catholics. There are a few Protestants and members of other religions in the big cities; but in the smaller towns only Catholics live, and so it was in the little town where I was born, that is, Roulers in West Flanders.

During the summer months, school lasted from eight o'clock till half-past

eleven in the morning, and from half-past one till four o'clock in the afternoon. During the winter months it starts half an hour later. We wore leather shoes only in summer; in the winter we wore wooden shoes, called *kloefen* or *blokken*, which were much warmer. We carried our books for evening study in book-bags strapped to our backs. In that bag each of us also had his bottle of coffee or milk, bread and butter, and perhaps an apple or an orange to eat at ten o'clock, when playtime came.

CHAPTER III

TEN O'CLOCK PLAYTIME

THAT ten o'clock playtime, that was the happiest part of the day! Let me tell you about some of our games. The most popular game with the little ones was "catch-me-wood." One of the children had to catch another; just touch him, and the one touched would now have to try to catch another boy. But, and here the game became more interesting, the intended "catch" might flee to a tree or to a door or to a little piece of wood on the ground and take hold of it; and as long as he touched wood, he could not be caught. One day we played "catch-me-wood," another day it would be "catch-me-iron," or "catch-me-stone," or any other "catch-me" we might have

in mind; but "catch-me-wood" was the most popular.

One of these "catch-me's" was "cross-catch-me," and you will need some more explanation to understand this game. One of us was again selected to be "it," and all the others would try to get away. Now the chase started. Suppose Robert was chasing Pieter, trying to catch him. Just as Robert was nearing Pieter, on came Bertje, and ran between Robert and Pieter, thus "crossing off the catch." Now Robert had to try to catch Bertje before another boy could "cross" him. And so the game would go on and on. When a catch was made, it was the boy who had been touched who had to run and catch the others.

I am told that a similar game, called "cross-tag," is well known among the boys and girls of this country.

The playgrounds are in front or at the back of the schools, and they have quite long runs shaded by big trees.

For one of our games we would draw a line dividing the playground into two sections. One of us would be the station-master and stand on the line. The rest of us would approach him, and the following conversation would occur:

"Where are you going?" the station-master would ask.

"To Ostend (or any other city we had in mind)," the boys would sing.

"Where is your ticket?"

"We have no ticket."

"Then you shall not pass."

"We must pass, and we shall pass."

And then the chase would begin, each one of us trying to get over the line and pass the station-master, who was doing his best to catch one of us.

He usually would catch one or two. Next time the same conversation was repeated, except for a change in the name of our destination. Moreover, this time the station-master was helped in his work by the boys he had caught, and who now

were his assistants. We would play like this until the station-master had captured all the boys.

Each game had its season. I have never been able to find out who ruled these sport seasons, but the fact remains that about the same time each year came the season for playing ball, then for marbles, then for spinning tops, then for hoop-rolling; then it was "*jet*"; after that it would be "*kalinker*," or cherry-stones, or disk-throwing.

I believe that you know all about ball, marbles, tops, and hoops; but perhaps you would like some enlightenment about the other games. I suggest that you try some of them in this country, as there is a good deal of fun to be found in each one of them.

CHAPTER IV

"JET"

LET me tell you first about the *jet*. It was a stick about five inches long and one inch thick, pointed at both ends. It was placed on a stone with one end projecting. With another stick about three times as long, one boy would hit the *jet* off the stone, and the others, standing at some distance, tried to catch the *jet* before it fell to the ground. Before the boy hit the stick he would cry "*Jet*"; and he could not hit it until the others cried back, "Yea." If one of them could catch it, it was his turn to hit; and the game started over again. The *jet* was usually caught with the hands, but it was allowable to hold one's cap for it.

But let us suppose that no one did catch it. Then the boy nearest to the

spot where the *jet* fell would pick it up; the boy who had hit the *jet* would place his stick in front of the stone; and the other boy would throw the *jet* and try to hit this stick with it. If he did hit it it would be his turn to knock the *jet* off the stone.

In case he did not touch the stick, however, the boy who was first "it" had to strike the *jet* and make it fly farther away from the stone. He could do this three times, providing that each time the *jet* fell farther away from the stone. He could accomplish this by striking the *jet* lightly, so as to catch it on the back of his stick when it fell, and in that way give a more powerful toss to the *jet* while it was still in the air. Or he could try to catch the *jet* several times on his stick, using the latter like a racquet.

When he had hit the *jet* three times, the other boys would ask, "How much?" And the first boy had to judge how far the *jet* lay from the stone, that is, how

many lengths of his stick. If he said fifty or one hundred lengths, and the boys agreed with him, he could add the amount stated to his score, and start the game anew. But if the boys thought that not so many stick-lengths were in the distance between the *jet* and the stone, the boy who had thrown the *jet* would have to measure the distance with his stick in as straight a line as possible, starting from the end of the *jet* farthest away from the stone. If the total of lengths was more than his estimate all the better for him; he could now take the bigger total as his score. If the total was less than his guess, he had lost, and must take his chance with the other boys. The boy who had thrown the *jet* to the stone now took his place. The game continued until one of the boys had reached the final score of five hundred, or one thousand, or whatever amount had been previously agreed upon.

There is one more point about this

game, and one which for us was of the utmost importance, because if one had the ability to do it, therein lay a chance to win the game almost at once. You noticed that three trials were allowed to hit the *jet* off the stone the second time; and that the boy would try to catch the *jet* as many times as possible on his stick. I will now tell you why he did so. If he could catch the *jet* only once on his stick, the distance from the stone to the *jet* would be measured according to the length of his stick; but if he could catch the *jet* twice on his stick, the distance would be measured by half stick-lengths, and so double his score.

The following table gives the scale of measurement:

One catch	measure with full stick
Two catches	" " half stick
Three "	" " *jet*
Four "	" " half *jet*
Five "	" " top of *jet*
Six "	" " half top of *jet*
Seven "	the game was won without measuring.

The game does look a little complicated, but it is very easy once the rules are understood. Moreover, you can learn it at first without including all of the rules, for instance, leaving out the smaller measures, until you know how to play it quite well. Then use all the rules.

CHAPTER V

"KALINKER," CHERRY-STONES, AND DISKS

THE "*Kalinker*" is a game which is just as popular with the boys as with the girls. I have found no name to translate it, so I give it here its national Belgian name. To play it you need a square flat piece of wood about one inch thick and three or four inches wide. This is called the *kalinker*. On the ground draw one of the diagrams pictured on the opposite page, about six or seven yards in length and about three or four in width. The first diagram is used by the younger children, the second by the older ones, or those who know the game better.

The game can be played with several children, but usually not more than five or six play with one diagram. One of

the boys starts the game by standing in front of the line A B, being careful not to touch the lines of the diagram with his feet. He then throws the *kalinker* into the space numbered one. Now he has to

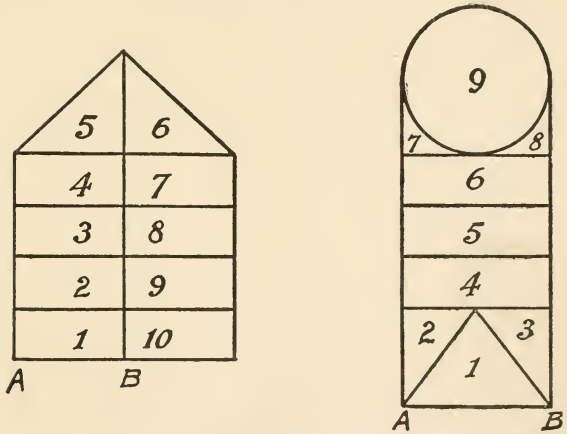

DIAGRAM FOR "KALINKER," OR BELGIAN HOP-SCOTCH.

hop on one foot into this space, and try to kick the *kalinker* back over the line A B. He is allowed to jump on one foot several times in the space numbered one, but if he touches a line with his foot, or if he touches the *kalinker* without kicking it

over the line A B, he has forfeited his turn.

But let us say that everything goes well, and that he has been successful in kicking out the *kalinker*. He next has to throw it into space two; kick the *kalinker* with the foot on which he is jumping into space one; hop on the same foot into space one; kick the *kalinker* over the line A B, and hop out, always on one foot. He repeats the same thing for spaces three, four, five, etc., hopping on one foot, and kicking the *kalinker* from space to space, until it is over line A B. It is a foul:

To stand with a foot on the lines.

To stand on two feet when in the diagram.

To throw or kick the *kalinker* on a line.

To touch the *kalinker* with the foot without kicking it into the next space.

The game is won by the boy who first goes through all the spaces. When any

one misses in space four, for instance, he can start again from space four at his next turn.

Sometimes it is permitted to kick the *kalinker* more than one space at a time, and also to rest on two feet in space six. This is also a fine game, and surely you must try to play it with your friends.

We used to play for cherry-stones during the cherry season in midsummer. Each had a small bag in which he kept his collection of dried and colored cherry-stones, often having as many as four or five thousand. We sold them afterwards to nursery-men at five Belgian cents a thousand. This is about two cents in United States money.

We used to play for cherry-stones in this way. We drew a diagram of about a foot in length on the ground or on paper, like that on the following page.

Two boys or girls play together. Jan would start the game by putting a little black stone on A; Jef would next put a

little red or white stone on I or anywhere else he fancied; and Jan would put his next stone at B. The boy who first has

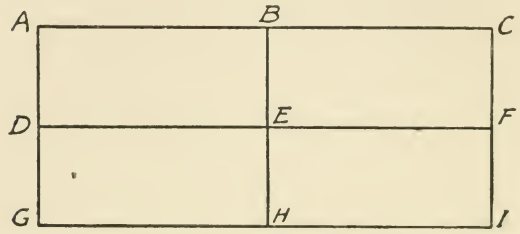

DIAGRAM FOR GAME WITH CHERRY-STONES.

his three stones on one straight line wins the game.

As Jan now has a stone on A and one on B, Jef will next put a stone on C, and he will now have his two stones on C and I. If Jan is bright, he will at once put his third stone on F so that Jef cannot complete his line of three. Jef will perhaps put his third stone at G. After this move each boy has three stones in the game. There are left three open spaces into which each boy in

turn moves one of his stones, until one boy finishes his straight line, and wins.

The stake would be ten, twenty-five, or even one hundred cherry-stones at a time, so we paid a great deal of attention to the placing and moving of the stones. After a while there is a good deal of ability necessary to win a game.

Several boys could play disk-throwing together. First we drew two parallel lines about two yards long on the ground about six or seven yards apart. We used round flat metal disks two inches in diameter, each boy having three disks marked with his initials, or a heart, or cross, or some other sign. We could buy them at the store three for one sou, that is, one Belgian cent.

Each boy in turn would stand behind one line, and throw his disks one at a time, trying to come as near as possible to the other line. The disk nearest to the line won one count, and if on the line it counted two. If more than one

disk was on the line, they would count two for each one, no matter to whom the disks belonged. Twenty-five or fifty points made the game, and usually the stake was one or two marbles.

CHAPTER VI

WORK AT SCHOOL

As I told you before, I was born at Roulers, a town of about twenty-five thousand inhabitants. Roulers is situated in the province of West Flanders. Belgium has nine provinces, and its whole area is only about eleven thousand five hundred square miles,—much less than some of the states in this country.

In the northern part of the country, —comprising the provinces of West and East Flanders, the provinces of Antwerp, Limburg, and the northern part of Brabant,—people speak Flemish, which is the same as the Dutch language. In the southern part of Belgium, called the Walloon provinces,—that is, Hainault, Namur, Liège, and Luxemburg,—the

people speak the French language. You will readily understand that in such a small country, where it takes only four or five hours by rail to travel from one end to the other, everybody wants to know the two languages. As I was born in Flanders, we spoke Flemish at home, and so I had to learn French at school.

Children start learning French when seven or eight years old. After they have studied it for one year, they have to speak it always during playtime. To enforce this rule, a little book, called the "sign," circulates among the school-children. On Monday morning the teacher has the "sign" in his pocket, and as he walks about among the children, he listens to their talk. When he hears a boy speak Flemish, the teacher takes out the "sign" and gives it to the boy. This boy will write his name in the booklet, and carry it in his pocket. He is not allowed to play as long as he carries the "sign," but he

must be on the lookout for another boy not speaking French, and when he hears one, he will at once hand the "sign" to the second boy.

This boy knows what it means, and will make very little fuss about it so that his comrades will not notice that he now carries the sign-book. He rapidly writes his name in the book, and is now himself on the lookout for a boy speaking Flemish. Each week a count is made of the number of times your name is in the "sign," and one point is lost for each time your name is in it. For instance, if your name was signed four times you would lose four points of the twenty which were to be won for speaking French regularly.

A "good points" book is given each Saturday to each pupil, and in it stands a record of his week's work. For instance, he will get fifteen out of twenty points for French; twenty out of twenty for Flemish, twelve out of twenty for

arithmetic, and so on. His father or mother has to sign his name in the book under each weekly report.

If children do not attend school, a card is sent at once to their parents asking the reason for the absence, so that there is no chance for the school-children to be absent without their parents knowing it the same day. School is in session for six days every week, and it was only when we were beginning to learn French that we were given Thursday afternoon free. Of course we have also Christmas, Easter, and the summer holidays.

All the children must go to school up to their thirteenth year, and as it is not possible for the children of the canal-boatmen to go to school regularly, special "holiday" classes exist for them.

Belgium is for the most part a flat country, and many canals have been digged to make the transportation of goods easier. On these canals are the canal-barges or canal-boats with the boat-

A Canal in Belgium.

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man, his wife, and his children living on board.

Now as these canal-barges are always travelling from one city to the other, you see that it would be impossible for the children living on them to go to *one* school regularly. Therefore wherever the boat arrives and lies for more than one day, unloading and loading, the children of the boatmen are sent to the "holiday" school; so called because the children who attend have a holiday during most of the week, as they go to school only for one or two days at a time. This holiday class is small, and its members are always new.

In order that the schoolmaster of each school they attend may at once know how far advanced these children are, the children carry special report-books in which each master will write not only about the lesson he taught, but also about the advance lesson which he gave the pupils to study. With the help of this

book every master can at once pick up the study where the former master stopped. It may seem curious, but many of these canal-children, in spite of their scanty childish instruction, afterwards become good college students. They gain mental ability as well as knowledge by their varied experience and observation.

CHAPTER VII

HOLIDAYS IN BELGIUM

THE Christmas and New Year's holidays are only for one week, and as the weather then is nearly always rainy and cold, we had to keep indoors most of the time. Christmas day is usually a very quiet one in Belgium, as no presents are given to children then.

St. Nicholas day, however, which falls on the sixth of December, was always a great event. Then we had our basket put under the chimney, and in the morning it was filled with all kinds of candy and playthings. At school, too, we would find that the schoolmaster had put some candy and either a new pencil or penholder in our desks.

Another big day for us was New Year's

day. For this day we made no end of preparations. A month before we had to tell the schoolmaster how many New Year's letters we had to write : we wrote them to our parents, to our grandfather and grandmother, to aunts and uncles, and often even to some special family friend. We wrote these letters at school with the utmost care on fine, big, white sheets of paper adorned with colored flowers and other illustrations in the left-hand corner. We had to practise reading these letters aloud, and often one letter was rewritten five or six times before the master would find it good enough to be given and read at New Year's.

The day before Christmas, when the holiday began, we took the letters home and carefully hid them. Then on New Year's morning at the breakfast-table I had to stand up and formally wish Father and Mother a " happy and blessed New Year," at the same time handing them my New Year's letter.

After Father had looked it over, he would ask me to read it. I can still see myself standing there with the letter held fast by both hands, saluting first Mother then Father, and starting, "Dear Father and Dear Mother," and finishing with the date. After I had read my letter, the New Year's cake was brought in and put on the table,—a big, square currant-cake with circular flat decorations in the middle of the crust. Then Father gave me a double-franc-piece, and Mother also a franc, which were to be put to my account at the post-office bank. (A postal bank-book is given each school-child, and each Monday he has to bring to school at least one cent, which is put to his savings account.)

But this was only the beginning of the day, and many visits were to be made. I had to go to my grandparents', to my uncles' and aunts', and everywhere I had to read my New Year's letters, drink chocolate, and eat New Year's cake, and

receive one franc or double-francs for the bank. My rich Uncle Camille would even sometimes give me a big five-franc-piece, but that was the exception.

During the Easter holidays the weather was better, and we could play outside. On Good Friday the church-bells and the chimes were never rung, and we were told that the bells had gone to Rome and would return next morning with the Easter eggs. We were up early Saturday morning, making little nests of hay, which we hid about the garden between bushes and in the flower-beds.

Then while we had breakfast, Father or Mother would go into the garden and put the colored eggs and also chocolate and sugar eggs in the nests. And when at eight o'clock the church-bells rang, we would all cry out:

"The church-bells have returned from Rome! The church-bells have come back!"

And I would rush to the garden and

look for my little nest, and find the eggs, and shout for joy! Everywhere the children were on the street with their nests of Easter eggs, showing and comparing their treasures. The richer people gave their children big chocolate eggs filled with smaller sugar eggs; the poorer people gave hen's eggs which the mothers had colored gold and red and blue; but all the children were equally happy and glad that day.

With the summer holidays, which began in the middle of August and lasted until the first of October, would come the distribution of prizes. That yearly prize distribution is one of the big happenings in the life of the school-children in Belgium. Preparations were made weeks beforehand: we had to learn a play, to learn the national anthem, to learn a special gymnastic lesson and many other things, all of which would be performed at the distribution of the prizes. But before the prizes came the examinations for

which the weekly reports were used as a basis, and there was much speculation between us over the probable winners of the first prizes.

The day for the prize distribution was officially announced to all the parents; the newspapers also gave notice of it, so that it became a sort of a holiday. And when the day came, the burgomaster was there, and the priests from the different Catholic churches, and all the schoolmasters in official black suits and white gloves. All the schoolboys had new suits and their mothers, aunts, and friends came dressed in their best to the big hall where the prize distribution was to be held.

First the head-master said a few words of thanks to the priests, the burgomaster, and the parents and friends of the schoolchildren for coming to this celebration. The band then played several selections. After that the children sang, performed gymnastic exercises, played games, and

acted a play. One boy would have to tell a story, five or six others would give a representation of some historic happening, and after all this entertainment the real distribution of the prizes would begin.

I can tell you from experience that our hearts were beating fast when the announcements began. Each boy hoped to be one of the first of his class! First the master of the younger boys would read the names of the prize-winners in his class. You must have been through it yourself to appreciate fully the pride and gladness written on the face of the little man of five or six years, when his name was called as being the first of his class. He would walk up to the burgomaster, who put a laurel crown on the boy's head, and said a few words of congratulations before he handed the prize book to the winner. The band always played the national anthem while a boy was receiving the first prize.

Then the names of the second, third, and fourth prizes were called. Among the "little ones," as the first class was called, each boy received a prize, even if he was the last of his class. It would then be called an encouragement prize; but the boy would be just as proud as if it were a first prize.

When it came to the French language classes, however, only the first five or six boys received prizes. This was more serious, we felt, and the competition between us was therefore harder. When all the prizes had been distributed, the burgomaster rose and said that he felt very happy and proud to have the children of this school try so hard to do their best and that now he granted us a six weeks' holiday as a final recompense. The band would play the "*Brabançonne*" again, while everybody stood and sang it together. And then holiday!

CHAPTER VIII

UNCLE DOREN AND HIS MILL

"ROBERT, if you are a good boy this week, we will go to Uncle Doren's mill next Thursday." So spoke my mother one Monday morning during the holiday weeks. And the promise delighted me, because a visit to Uncle Doren was always a happy day. Monday, Tuesday, and Wednesday were long days for quiet behavior, but Thursday arrived at last, and I was up early and ready more than an hour before the time to start came.

Uncle Doren lived in the village of Hooglede about six miles from our home, and to reach his house we had to take the tram,—a little steam railway running in the streets, and connecting the villages to the cities in Belgium. These trams are now gradually disap-

pearing, and the electric cars are taking their places.

It took us more than an hour to get to Hooglede. The mill stands on top of the hill, and the wings were turning rapidly, as we could see from the windows of the tram, as it steamed up the hill to the market-place before the church. Pol and his sister Margaret, the children of my uncle, with Duke, the dog, were waiting for us at the arrival of the tram. The children were expecting me, and they told me at once of the preparations in our honor. Aunt Marie had made rice-tart, and we would have French fried potatoes at noon and we would take a long drive in the dog-cart with Duke to draw us, and we would go to the windmill, and do no end of other things.

Uncle was at work in the mill when we arrived at the farmhouse, but Aunt Marie was standing on the door-step waiting for us. She had already cried "Welcome!" when we were still on the road.

A Belgian Windmill.

Ancient Watch-Tower and Dam at Bruges.

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We were led at once to the dining-room, where, after taking off our hats, we were urged to eat some currant bread, as Aunt Marie feared we might be hungry after our journey.

A description of such a farmhouse dining-room might interest you. It had two windows with little square glass panes. Beneath these windows was a bench, which ran all along the front wall and in front of the bench stood the long whitewashed wooden table with dark-brown straw-covered chairs placed around it. In one corner were the stairs leading to the upper floor, and in a nook near the stairs a tall oaken Flemish clock sounded each quarter-hour, and indicated not only the hour and minutes but also the periods of the moon and the seasons.

A big open fireplace occupied another side of the room. By this fireplace stood Uncle Doren's arm-chair, and there, too, hung his long pipe, the copper match-box, and his tobacco-pouch. From a shelf

above the fireplace hung a short, blue curtain with tiny white dots in it, and on the shelf itself stood a row of old round dishes. These were dishes which had been in the family for many years, big plates with many-colored flowers, and others with fruit and other farm produce represented on them. Just above the middle of the shelf hung the cross with the ivory Christ on it.

The floor was of red tiles with white sand strewn on it. In the sand pretty designs had been made with the sweeping-brush. On the walls were a few pictures, and near the stairs was placed a little stone holy-water pot with some palm-leaves fastened above it.

After we had eaten a little, Pol and Margaret took me to the cart-house where the little driving-cart for Duke was also kept. Duke was eager to be harnessed. The dog-cart was about the size of a baby's four-wheeled go-cart, but about twice as wide. It had only two seats, but

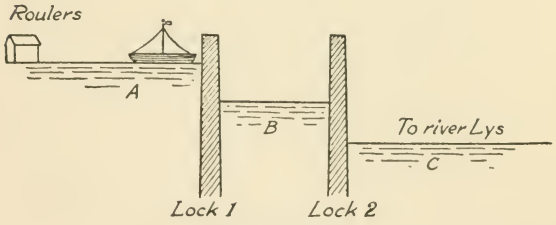
one more passenger could easily be seated at the back, if he did not object to having his legs dangle outside.

The dog and cart were soon ready, and off we went at a rapid pace. We drove quite a long way along the canal, and met several flat-bottomed barges, laden with all kind of farm produce, and each one drawn by a horse who walked steadily along the canal dyke. The driver would either follow his horse, or would walk behind with another driver, often more than two hundred yards behind his own barge, where another horse was drawing another barge. Soon we came to the lock-bridge which we had to cross. But we were obliged to wait here, as the lock was open, and some boats must pass first.

I think that the working of these canal-locks would interest you, and therefore I will tell you how the ships pass through them.

Roulers is connected by a canal to the River Lys. Now although there are no

mountains and only low hills in the Flanders, the land slopes slightly; for instance, the city of Roulers lies higher than the River Lys. So, you see, all the water in the canal would flow into the Lys, if it was not checked on its way, and the canal would very soon be dry. It is to prevent this occurrence that canal-locks are built. Here is a little picture of the lock that may help you to understand it more easily.



CANAL-LOCKS.

First notice the boat which is to pass from the canal at Roulers to the River Lys, and notice also the difference in height between the water level A and the level C. In order, therefore, that the

water in section A of the canal cannot all flow into section C and leave section A dry, there has been constructed at the point where the canal joins the river, somewhere near the middle of the canal, a door-locked section B. This section B is only about forty yards long, and is closed by big wooden doors. Now when the ship coming from Roulers into section A wants to enter the lock, the lock-keeper slowly opens, by means of machinery at the side of the lock, the door of Lock 1, and the water in section A flows into section B; and after a short while the water in sections A and B is at the same level.

As soon as the ship has been towed into section B, the lock-keeper will close Lock 1, and then slowly open the doors of Lock 2. The water now flows from section B into section C, and again in a short time the level of the water in B and C is the same. The boat can now proceed on its journey. If a ship wants

to go from the Lys to Roulers, the operation of the locks is naturally reversed.

It did not take long for the boats to go through the lock that day, and we could soon drive over the bridge. But it was very warm, and Duke let his tongue hang out of his mouth, and trotted more slowly after a while. So we halted near a little brook, and here we played the best part of the forenoon, catching stickleback fishes.

But before we realized it the church-bells struck the half-hour. It was half-past eleven and time to go home for dinner, which is served at all the farmhouses about five minutes past twelve o'clock. When the bells in the church-tower strike noon, all the working-men hasten home, where the buttermilk soup stands ready on the table.

We all sat together at the long table,—Uncle, Aunt Marie, my mother, and we children at the end of the table nearest the fireplace, and the maid and the five

A Dog-Cart in Belgium.

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ASTOR LENOX AND
TILDEN FOUNDATIONS.

men working on the farm and in the mill at the other end. Uncle Doren said grace while every one remained standing. The men stood with their caps in their two hands before their eyes meanwhile, and after the blessing they put their caps on their heads again, and kept them on during dinner.

The farm dinner was a simple meal, starting with buttermilk soup, followed by potatoes, bacon or pork, and vegetables. Usually that would be all, but to-day Aunt Marie had prepared rice-tart,—a cherished dish for all children in Belgium. Did Grandmother not always tell us when we were babies that in heaven we would eat rice-tart with silver spoons? You can imagine that we tried our best to do honor to that rice-tart, and that although it was a very big one, nothing was left of it at the end of the meal.

After dinner Pol asked me to go with him to the mill. Do you know how a Flemish windmill is built? It has four

wings fitted with sails, which are opened more or less, according to the velocity of the wind. The whole upper structure, including these wings, is supported by an upright shaft, and can be turned round at will. Consequently, whichever way the wind blows—north, south, east, or west—the miller is able to turn the wings "to the wind," and the wings will start revolving, and will work the grinding-stones inside, which crush and mill the grain.

In Belgium the windmills are used chiefly to make flour and to crush the rape-seed and extract the rape-seed oil. Inside the mill there are stairways which extend all the way to the top. It was out there on the top that we children liked to go, as the outlook was fine. We could see the whole country for miles around; and we took great delight in watching some train wind its way across the fields, puffing white smoke into the air, or in counting the many church-towers, and naming the different villages.

But best of all was the long rope which dangled from the horizontal axle, and which was used to lower the sacks of flour into the peasants' carts. Pol and myself loved to cling to this rope and be lowered from the top of the mill to the carts below. Nobody seemed to think this was a dangerous thing to do, even though we should have dropped more than twenty yards below if we had let go the rope. Well, this accident never happened, to my knowledge. Perhaps Uncle had done the same thing when he was a child, and so did not see any harm in our doing it. We would simply cling to the rope, and there was no question of letting go.

In the afternoon Mother and Aunt Marie, with Pol, Margaret, and myself, went for a walk in the fields. Aunt Marie wished to show Mother how fine the crops were looking, and said that if all went well, the crop of potatoes and sugar-beets would be better that year than the year before. As we passed the house

of Farmer Vandenberghe, we saw that all the blinds were closed, and that a straw cross was lying in the road in front of the farm, indicating to all passers-by that there had been a recent death in that family. We all crossed ourselves, and according to the custom, silently said a prayer for the soul of the dead.

Aunt Marie now told us about the daughter of Farmer Vandenberghe. She was twelve years old, had received her first communion the year before, and was already such a great help to her mother. Unfortunately she had taken a bad cold, which grew so much worse that she had finally died, and was now an angel in heaven. The funeral was to be held in the morning, and Margaret was to take part in the service.

If I could stay, said Aunt Marie, I could also go to the funeral the next day.

Mother let herself be persuaded, and to my joy I was allowed to stay over night and sleep with Pol in his bed. Mother

went home alone, and soon after supper Pol and I went to bed.

The funeral of Threseken Vandenberghe was to take place at nine o'clock in the morning. The school-children of the village were present. All the girls, dressed in white with little crowns of white flowers in their hands, marched to the outskirts of the village, and there awaited the coming of the big four-wheeled cart covered with a white linen cloth and drawn by two horses. On this cart, which served as a hearse, stood the little coffin. Behind it followed the parents, brother and sisters of the dead child.

When the cart reached the first houses of the village, the school-children surrounded it. Then the ten eldest climbed into the cart, and took the little white-draped coffin on their shoulders. In this way they all marched on,—first the eldest children with the coffin, then the other girls, then Threseken's parents and family, and finally the boys and other persons of

the village who had come to the burial service.

At the doors of the church, the procession halted and the priests came singing to the door. After the usual prayers of the funeral service the children bore the coffin to the grave. Each little girl in turn threw her crown of flowers into the grave, and each boy and grown-up person threw a small spadeful of earth into the grave. It was sad indeed to see the poor parents weeping and weeping over their lost child.

CHAPTER IX

GRANDMOTHER

My grandmother was about sixty years old, and she lived in a corner house near the railroad station. From my earliest childhood I liked to go to her house to see the trains pass by, and now that I come to think of it, I believe my longing for travel was born at that time. I well remember how I always kept asking Grandmother what there was at the place where the train disappeared into the horizon, and when we would go and see what lay behind that vanishing point. And Grandmother would give me some explanation or other, and would try to pacify me. But if I got too restless, she would tell me that she was going to make some candies.

Well, that quieted me each time.

Grandmother's candies! How delicious they were! When in later years I bought candy, I always missed that flavor which Grandmother's had; I have tried to make candies myself, too, for my little children, but to me they never tasted quite the same as Grandmother's candies. Perhaps if you try, you can find the lost flavor. I will tell you how to make the candies, and if you discover the special flavor I was telling about, you can send me some of your candies. I shall be very glad to taste them.

Grandmother made two kinds of candy, but the second kind was about the same as the first. You want first a clean saucepan and a good hot fire. Then put into the saucepan half a pound of brown sugar; pour on it half a teacupful of water; and then add some butter about the size of a small match-box. Now stir slowly with a spoon until everything melts and begins to boil. Watch the candy carefully. If it boils

too fast, take it off the open fire, and put it on the lid. It must not boil too quickly. At first the bubbles will come in multitudes and burst quickly on the surface of the boiling sugar, and if you let the candy drip from the spoon then, it looks thin. After some more cooking, the bubbles become scarcer and deeper, and the candy gets much thicker. Watch it carefully. Now it is about done.

Have ready half a dozen buttered plates. Look at the candy again : it is turning a little browner, and the bubbles now hardly burst, and when they do, they make what looks like a deep hole in the boiling candy. It is ready now. Have a wet handkerchief ready so the handle of the pan will not burn your hand. Take the saucepan from the stove, and pour the candy slowly on the plates. Do not pour too much ; see that you have some for each plate. Let it cool a while, and now taste it. Do you like it? Does it have Grandmother's flavor?

The other candy Grandmother made was really about the same, except that when it was nearly done, Grandmother would drop in a quarter-pound of chopped almond pits, or walnut meats, or chopped figs. It is not hard to make this candy, too, but I advise you to start with the first kind.

My grandmother was also my best friend, and I well remember that when I was a child I always said I would marry Grandmother. On such days as Three Kings' Day in January we would feast at Grandmother's home together with my cousins, and other girls and boys of the neighborhood were assembled.

You remember the story of three kings who came to Bethlehem, bringing gold, incense, and myrrh to Jesus. In Belgium that day is still a kind of a holiday for the children ; the evening before and the whole Day of the Three Kings children march through the streets, each one car-

rying a stick tipped with a star. The star is adorned with all kinds of colored paper, and can be turned round by drawing a cord. The boys and girls go singing from door to door, making their stars turn round quickly as they sing. They receive small presents from many kind-hearted people.

The song which the children sing is as follows :

" Mÿn sterre, mÿn sterre niet stille meer staan
Wÿ moeten te samen naar Betlehem gaan
Naar Betlehem die schoone stad
Waar kindje Jesus geboren lag."

" My star, my star, do not stand still ;
To Bethlehem we must now be hieing,
To Bethlehem, that wonderful town
Where Child Jesus is in his manger lying."

CHAPTER X

STORIES GRANDMOTHER TOLD ME

My grandmother told me a great many stories about Emperor Charles V, who was born at Ghent. Emperor Charles was a peculiar man. He delighted in playing tricks on every one he could, and he was never cross when a trick was played on him.

One day when he was at Audenarde, several students were drinking at the tavern on the market-place. Emperor Charles happened to pass the tavern on his big horse, and one of the students, who had been drinking too much beer, made a wager with his comrades that he would pull the nose of the Emperor. This proposition looked so out of the common that it was at once accepted.

What did the student now do? He

went to the barber of the Emperor and treated him to so many glasses of beer that by night the barber could not stand on his feet, and fell asleep in the tavern.

Now it was the custom of the Emperor to be shaved early in the morning in the presence of his courtiers. While Peer, the usual barber, was still sleeping off his beer, the student presented himself at the royal apartments to shave the Emperor, saying that Peer was sick, and that he was his son. The student was admitted at once, and after some jests made by the Emperor, the " barber " was able to begin shaving.

He put on the soap, and then took the Emperor's nose between two fingers, and started to shave. And he pulled the Emperor's nose this way, and he pulled it that way ; he pulled it up and down, and all the time kept a most serious face and went on with the shaving.

So the students had to admit that he had pulled the nose of the Emperor, and therefore won his wager.

One of the counselors of the Emperor was Dirk de Vos. In those days court etiquette was not as formal as it is now, and Counselor Dirk de Vos was called Dirk, for short, by all the people of the palace.

By a coincidence it happened that the Empress had a cat also named Dirk. She was very fond of this cat, and took him with her everywhere. He used to sit in her lap and when she would stroke his fur, the cat would purr and arch his back to please his mistress.

One day Dirk, the cat, fell sick, and although the Empress gave him milk, and tried all kinds of remedies, it was without avail. Poor Dirk died, and the Empress shed many tears over her pet.

The next morning she summoned the cook, who was in those days a man of great importance, and told him that she wanted Dirk to be stuffed at once.

When the cook heard this order, he fell on his knees, and asked :

"Oh, gracious Empress, is it really your order that Dirk shall be stuffed, or have I misunderstood?"

"Yes, that is my order, and I want it done at once. You will have Dirk stuffed, and bring him to me this evening without fail."

The poor cook had to agree. Counselor Dirk was his friend, but what could he, a mere cook, do? If the Empress ordered Dirk to be stuffed, well, the cook must execute that order. Oh, it was an awful world, he thought, and this was a terrible order! And as he did not dare go to Dirk alone, he took with him the four soldiers who had stood in attendance when the Empress gave the order.

After some inquiry the cook and his guard found Counselor Dirk in his office. The cook came forward with the four soldiers, and began:

"Friend Dirk, I have sad news for you."

"What is that?" asked Dirk de Vos. "Am I to be put in prison?"

"It is worse than that, friend Dirk, and I hardly know how to tell you."

"What then, does the Emperor want me to be deported?"

"Worse still, friend Dirk. Oh, it is awful!"

"Oh, heavens! You do not say that I have so displeased my Lord King that he wants me to die?"

"Oh, friend Dirk, how can I tell you? This suspense is awful for you, so I will inform you that the Empress wants you to be stuffed at once, and brought to her before the evening."

"Stuffed! Stuffed, you fool?" cried Dirk.

"Oh, I wish I were a fool!" groaned the cook, "but these soldiers can vouch for the order. And as time passes, I must pray thee, friend Dirk, to make haste. We must go at once to the stuffer."

It did the counselor no good to plead,

or to protest that such an order was never heard of before, and that surely there was a mistake. The cook said that he regretted the order more than anybody else, but that he was not going to risk being stuffed himself, too, by displeasing the Empress; and he made the four soldiers seize poor Dirk de Vos.

And so, crying and howling for help, Dirk was on his way to the stuffer, and all the people in the streets exclaimed at this awful procession. The people said that surely Dirk de Vos must have done a most terrible thing to incur such a punishment! They had known of men being hung and of others being quartered, but being stuffed,—that was an unheard-of penalty.

When the soldiers, dragging the struggling Dirk between them, passed the palace, it happened that Emperor Charles stood at a window looking out on the street. At the sight of the soldiers with that man in their midst, howling and

fighting to get away, the Emperor became curious, and immediately sent a servant to bring the man before him.

Charles could not believe his own eyes when he saw that the prisoner was Dirk, his counselor. In reply to his questions the Emperor learned that by order of the Empress Dirk was to be stuffed; not only the cook, but the four soldiers assured Charles of that fact.

What now? What had Dirk done to the Empress? The Emperor requested her presence; and after a while she appeared in state dress, followed by ladies in waiting, because only on most formal occasions did the Emperor ask the Empress to come to the court-room.

When Dirk de Vos saw the Queen, he tore himself away from his guards and knelt down before her, asking her pardon for whatever he might have done to displease her.

But the Queen herself was bewildered, and it was only when Charles asked her

rather sharply why Dirk was to be stuffed, that she understood. Then she burst out laughing. Dirk stuffed? Yes, but Dirk her cat!

There were many more stories which Grandmother told me. Surely you know some of these stories in this country,—such as that of "Little Red Riding-Hood and the Wolf," "Beauty and the Beast," or "Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs." I always took much pleasure, too, in hearing about the foolish inhabitants of the imaginary village of Oolen, where the burgomaster and his counselors, when building a town-hall, forgot to have the windows put in the plan, so that there was no light in the hall when it was built; where the servant-girls would start washing the stairs from downwards up. It was real topsy-turvy land there in Oolen, where the people were so foolish that they did everything wrong.

CHAPTER XI

TO BOARDING-SCHOOL AT BLANKENBERGHE

When I was eleven years old I had to receive my first communion at the church. Every Friday morning for two years the curate had come to school to give us an hour's instruction about religious matters; and we spent the entire last two weeks before the communion day at church, as we had many instructions and commendations to receive. It was two weeks before Easter that we made our first communion, and, as usual, there was a big family dinner, including all my uncles and aunts, my grandmother and grandfather, at our house.

At this dinner the discussion turned to my future; I had finished my work at the primary school, and now the question to be decided was whether I should go to

college and study to be a lawyer, judge, notary, or any other public official, or whether I should take a commercial course at a boarding-school, and later become a business man, as my father was. I sat there at the head of the table listening and wondering what would be decided. My head was full of the wonderful tales of Fenimore Cooper and of Defoe's "Robinson Crusoe," and when my father at length asked me where I would like to go, I was quick enough in my answer, "To America!"

Of course that made everybody laugh, but, nevertheless, it settled the matter in the direction of the commercial instruction, because a boy who wanted so much to travel over the world would have more need for that kind of learning. It was arranged for me to go to the boarding-school at Blankenberghe by the seaside.

So after the Easter holidays I was sent to Blankenberghe. I well remember that

first trip, because I had to go alone, as my father was away from home on a journey, and Mother was sick. Ah, it is a hard separation to be away from home for three months, and although I was full of high spirits, and was pleased enough to go, I wept a long while before I left home and bade Mother farewell.

Now I had to get used to a new routine,—rising at six o'clock each morning, and going to bed regularly at nine o'clock each evening. The first weeks were awful. I longed for home and for my mother, I did not like the food, and wrote my parents that it was not good and that I did not want to stay at the school any longer.

Thereupon one day quite unexpectedly my mother paid me a visit, bringing with her candies and cakes and other sweets. She explained to me that if I ever was to become a man and travel all over the world, I must gain experience and must try to become accustomed to

other food, even if it was different from that which I got at home. Well, Mother's visit consoled me, and, perhaps because I felt more hungry after a while, the food at the school seemed to get better. Before the summer holiday came I was entirely used to it.

The sea-coast of Belgium is a very flat land, with sand-dunes about ten to twenty yards high at the water's edge. Formerly the sea flooded the whole of this sandy territory with each tide; but by means of dykes this rich land has been gradually reclaimed and fitted for cultivation. There live our hardy Flemish peasants. There also is made the renowned lace, which is known all over the world as Brussels lace, although nearly all of it is made in the Flanders. These peasants live a quiet, happy life, for they have few needs. Their houses are small, with straw-covered roofs to keep them warm in the winter; the man with his sons tills the land; and the wife and daughters

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old, whom everybody cheered as "Prince Albert." Even at that time we liked him for his fine, manly qualities.

That first time I saw him was vividly recalled to my mind in the early days of the present war, when at this same Bruges a big blue limousine was passing on its way to Ostend. Our King Albert sat in a corner alone. In the market-place a man recognized him, and called out, "*De Koning!*" ("The King!"). It seemed as if an electric current had shaken the whole city; the streets filled with people, all shouting, "Long live our King!"; the women were crying; and the general excitement was intense. Then some one started to sing "The Lion of the Flanders," with its, for us, entrancing chorus:

> "The Lion of the Flanders cannot be tamed
> As long as a Fleming lives."

King Albert was "The Lion of the Flanders" embodied again. As one man

we lived history over, and thrilled at the thought that our forefathers on the same market-place had sung the same anthem when Robert de Béthune was the deliverer of the country; when Breydel and Delonninck, our own men of the people,—whose statues now looked down on us from their marble pedestal in the middle of the market-place,—had fought with "Robert the Lion," and saved the Flanders from the French in 1302. The enemy then lost the flower of its nobles, and more than six hundred golden spurs were picked up from the battle-field of Courtrai, and hung from the ceiling of St. Martin's Cathedral there. This contest has been known ever since as "The Battle of the Spurs."

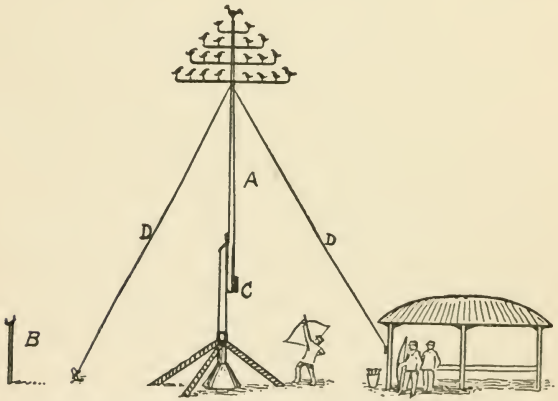
And now the people had flocked together again, and made obeisance to their King. The car had to stop for two or three minutes, and the King was obliged to speak a few words to his people before the way was open again.

But this is looking ahead of my school years. I stayed four years at the boarding-school at Blankenberghe, and grew to be a sturdy youth of fifteen. These years I passed at Blankenberghe have many happy remembrances for me; we were only from twelve to fifteen boys all together, and we became like brothers to each other. There were many more pupils coming each day to the same school, but they lived in the city, and went home each evening.

Our winters in Belgium are not so severe as in this country, and we rarely have zero weather. Nevertheless, we have some ice each winter, and skating is a favorite recreation with the school-children. As the ice-season is very short, it is customary to give the children some free afternoons to go skating. This does not mean, however, that each boy can go where he likes; all the teachers, even the head-master, go skating with the boys, and you often can see a whole school

skating on a pond or on the inundated meadows.

In the summer-time we had swimming, football, and shooting with the longbow. Archery clubs are to be found in every village and city of Belgium, and archery is one of the most popular sports. Let me give you a diagram and description of shooting with the longbow.



SHOOTING FOR WOODEN PIGEONS WITH THE LONGBOW.

On a long iron or wooden pole about forty to fifty yards high are arranged

several iron arms with pins on which are screwed wooden birds, or pigeons, as they are called. In order to affix the birds to the arms of the pole easily, the upper part A of the perch is lowered on the fork B, and after the birds are fastened, the pole is again raised to an upright position. It has thick hinges in the middle, making it possible for the upper part to be bent down. The bottom of this upper part has a heavy counter-weight to aid in raising and lowering it by the cords, and to hold it steady when upright.

The arrows have blunt, flat heads, and are tipped with horn. The "bowstring" is of wire.

The members of the archery club draw their places by lot, and each one knows when his turn to shoot will come. Each bird brought down means a prize, but the birds on the top of the perch are smaller, screwed on more tightly, and much more difficult to shoot off, because the thin steel bars on which they are mounted

swing from left to right in the wind. The topmost bird is the cock, and in it centers the interest of the game, since the cock's value as a prize is about twenty times the value of the smaller birds.

We would go whole Thursday and Sunday afternoons in summer to the archery grounds, and never tire of the game.

CHAPTER XII

A TRIP THROUGH BELGIUM

When I was fifteen years old, I came home for the summer holidays to a sad household. Father had lost a great deal of money, and instead of being able to study further at the Athenæum, as I had expected, I found that I must start at once to work with Father. Nevertheless, I did not mind in the least being home for good. I had been happy at school, but not going to school any more made me feel like a man, and the responsibility of working with Father assured me that everything would go the better for this change.

My parents, however, thought that I would be very sorry to be obliged to stay home, and therefore they promised me that in place of the usual two months'

holiday, Father would take me on a trip to several cities in Belgium.

I am not now going to give you a description of the various cities which we visited, because you can undoubtedly find much better information about each of these cities in the usual guide-books. But my father was full of little stories about things such as historic monuments, and since you probably have not heard of these things I will tell you some of them.

We left home on a Saturday afternoon, and went first to Tournai in the province of Hainault which, as I have told you, is in the French-speaking district of Belgium. It is a fine old city with many remarkable monuments and museums.

When we were standing in the market-place my father said to me:

"Robert, you see here many old houses with beautiful fronts. Next to that big house there stands a hotel where the Austrian Emperor Joseph II slept, when

Rear of Fortifications at Namur, showing Canal.

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in 1781, on his progress through Belgium, he came to Tournai.

"You know that Joseph II did not care anything for luxury and display. In the church of St. Gudule at Brussels, he refused to sit on the throne prepared for him, but sat instead on a small stool like a common man. He went about in a simple carriage and very often without attendants. Once he arrived in that fashion at a village where they awaited the visit from the Emperor. Joseph was alone and went to a simple inn. The innkeeper said to him:

"'You belong, without doubt, to the suite of the Emperor?'

"And the Emperor answered: 'I am the Emperor's barber.'

"You can imagine how confounded this innkeeper was later, when he saw to whom he had really spoken. Nevertheless, Joseph had told the truth, because he always shaved himself.

"He nearly always chose to lodge in

a roadside inn. Here at Tournai, when he came to visit, the burgomaster would have a kingly residence ready for him, but the Emperor preferred the hotel over there."

The following day we went to Oudenarde. In the square near the station stands a monument with the single name "*Tacamboro*" on it.

My father saw the inquiry in my eyes, and said:

"Tacamboro? Mexico? Does it not mean anything to you, Robert? This monument was erected in commemoration of the Belgians who perished in Mexico.

"Belgium and Mexico? What is the relation between these two countries, you will ask me," continued my father. "A daughter of our first King Leopold I, named Charlotte, was married to Maximilian, Archduke of Austria, who later became Emperor of Mexico. But through a terrible revolt of his subjects, he lost not only his empire, but also his life.

He was shot. Here at Oudenarde a regiment of Belgian soldiers was mustered as a body-guard for the Empress Charlotte in Mexico. After the death of Maximilian she became insane from sorrow; and she still lives in the castle of Meysse at Bouchout near Brussels."

Oudenarde is one of our oldest cities, so my father told me, and there was a time when at night there were no lights in the streets, and consequently much disturbance at night. In order to avoid the encounters in the dark between the townsmen, the burgomaster of Oudenarde issued a command that each person going on the streets after sunset must carry a lantern with him. But the people of Oudenarde did not like such an innovation, although they did not dare disobey. So what did they do now? They walked in the streets at night, and each carried a lantern—but without light in it.

A new order: Each lantern must be provided with a candle. The citizens

placed candles in their lanterns, but did not light the candles.

A third order was given: The candle must be lighted. The good citizens did not protest; they lighted the candles, and carried the lanterns under their mantles. And no punishment could be meted out to them, however much the burgomaster would have liked to do it, because all his commandments were strictly followed.

A fourth order was given: The lantern with lighted candle must be carried in such a way that the light could easily be seen. So finally the magistrates got their own way. After a while, of course, the citizens were obliged to confess that the order was a good one, and that everybody was now much safer on the streets at night.

We went from Oudenarde to Sottegem, where we saw the grave of Count Egmont, who was beheaded by the Spaniards during the time of Alva, of bloody remembrance to us.

In Ath, the next town on our itinerary, we visited the house in which Louis Hennepin was born. Hennepin was a missionary and one of the leaders of La Salle's expedition in America, and this Belgian missionary explored the Mississippi and Niagara Falls.

From Ath we went to Brussels, Belgium's most beautiful city, rightly called a jewel in a jewel country; and we visited all its historic monuments and wonderful museums. In the Church of Marie Louise, named after Belgium's first queen, and erected in her memory by national subscription, we saw the tombs of the kings and queens of Belgium. My father told me:

"You know, Robert, that our first Queen was dearly beloved by her people, for she was truly a benefactress toward the poor. She once saw a poor beggar boy, and told him to bring her to his home, a cellar in the slums of Brussels. The Queen was startled by the distress

which she saw there, and she at once provided for these people. To an old woman, chilled with cold, whom she met on the Bridge of Laeken, she gave her own mantle. Oh, she did many good deeds, and she was respected and honored by all her subjects.

"There at the end of the church is the vault with the royal tombs. There rest Leopold I with his wife, Marie Louise, Leopold II and his son, who died at the age of ten, and also the brother of Leopold II, the Count of Flanders, and his eldest son, Baudouin. Our present King Albert is the second son of the Count of Flanders."

CHAPTER XIII

MY FATHER'S STORY OF WATERLOO

From Brussels my father next took me to Waterloo, where he wanted me to see the historic battle-field which had meant the end of Napoleon. Even from afar we could see the big Lion on the hill. This monument is about five yards high and five yards long, and was placed on the slope of the hill at Waterloo by the allied powers who defeated Napoleon.

We mounted the hill until we reached the base of the monument, and there my father gave me in a few words a lesson of history which I understood far better than the more lengthy lesson about the same matter which I had learned at school. My father told me the story in this fashion :

"You know that Napoleon, after his

unsuccessful campaign in Russia and his defeats in Germany, was banished to the French Island of Elba near the coast of Italy. He arrived there in May, and at first he seemed to have accepted his lot quietly enough. 'This will be my country of rest,' he remarked. Nevertheless, the fallen emperor wanted still to reign, if only over this small island, and he organized an administration there. But in September his mood changed. His wife, as he had been promised, did not come to Elba; the money pledged him was not sent regularly; and he heard rumors of a banishment farther away, somewhere in Australia. Rumors even that his life was not safe reached him.

"Then the scheme for returning to France came to Napoleon. He miraculously escaped from Elba with his small flotilla through the English fleet guarding the Mediterranean coast, and landed in the south of France, where he received a joyful ovation from the inhabitants.

Near Grenoble, Napoleon met the Fifth Regiment of France, which had been sent to defeat him. He rode alone to the front of the regiment, and cried :

"'Soldiers of the Fifth, do you want to kill your Emperor? Then shoot; here he stands!'

"This was too much for them. Shouting with one voice, '*Vive l' Empéreur!*' the jubilant soldiers surrounded their 'little corporal.' And everywhere Napoleon was greeted with enthusiasm. His entrance into Paris was a triumph. The king had fled to Ghent.

"There was war again, because the powers of Europe could not allow Napoleon to regain his former dominion. And the question of authority was decided here on the field which lies around us. In the first days of June, 1815, the allied troops were marching to the French frontier, but Napoleon wanted to anticipate them, and so he penetrated into Belgium. The Germans, commanded by Blücher,

were somewhere near Namur. The English, together with the Dutch and Belgians, were south of Brussels under the command of Wellington. Napoleon did his best to prevent the two armies from uniting, for his plan was to beat the Germans and the English separately. He repulsed the Germans at Ligny, and left thirty-five thousand men under General Grouchy to keep the Germans from advancing any further.

"In the meantime Napoleon's general, Ney, attacked the English at Quatre-Bras. The Dutch and Belgians under the Prince of Orange resisted the first shock bravely. But the allies fared badly at first. At Ligny Blücher was wounded, and his horse was killed. At Quatre-Bras Wellington very nearly fell into the hands of the French. The English troops then retreated to a better position near Mount St. Jean, the hill which you see over there. The French army, as I said before, had been divided into two

parts: thirty-five thousand men under Grouchy were at Wavre trying to check the Germans, and the main body of the army, about eighty thousand strong, was here at Waterloo commanded by the Emperor himself.

"Wellington had a good position; in front of him stretched that roadway down there, which at that time was not graded. It was therefore a big hindrance to the French cavalry for an attack on the English troops, and many French horsemen died there. Wellington was at the farmhouse on Mount St. Jean. Behind the English troops lay the forest of Soignes, which you can see in the northeast. In case Wellington was defeated this forest would cover his retreat.

"Those days,—the seventeenth and eighteenth of June, 1815,—were real dog-days. It poured rain, too. On the night of the eighteenth Napoleon himself rode several times along the dark road to see if the English still kept their positions.

And the sight of the camp-fires on Mount St. Jean set his mind at rest.

"At eight o'clock he mounted his horse, ready for battle. But not until eleven o'clock could his troops occupy their designated positions, because they were obliged to wait for the thoroughly drenched and slippery ground to dry a little. For the Germans, who now were at Wavre, Napoleon seemed to have no fear; his only thought was of the English there before him.

"About half-past eleven sounded the first shot. Napoleon was over there on the little hill near the farm of Ronsomme. He ordered straw put on the ground and a table and a chair brought him. In this improvised camp, with his maps and glasses, the Emperor could see the whole battle-field. The encounter was terrible. Later, when you are older, you will be better able to understand the movements of the troops; but now I shall not explain them. At any rate, by six o'clock

in the evening the battle was still undecided.

"And now from the east shots could be heard. What army was that? Was it the thirty-five thousand Frenchmen under Grouchy, ready to attack the flanks of the tired English army? It was the Germans under Blücher!

"A last fight, a butchery of men! At nine o'clock the French army was destroyed. In the most terrible disorder the surviving were fleeing on the way to Genappe. The way was blocked by cannons, chariots, ambulance-vans filled with the wounded and the dying. Ah! It must have looked horrible on that night, this region that is so peaceful to-day.

"Napoleon, with his wounded brother, Jerome, and some of his staff officers, were fighting to the death in the last *carré;* but his followers drew him on with them over blood-drenched fields, where the harvests were downtrodden and strewn with wounded and dying

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men. A half hour after midnight they reached Genappe, where they hoped to find a coach for the Emperor, but the pursuing Germans were there before them. Bareheaded and without weapons, Napoleon threw himself upon his horse.

"Away, away, because the Germans gave no quarter! Before morning Napoleon rode as far as Charleroix. Three days later he reached Paris, sick and discouraged. From Paris Napoleon went to Rochefort, where he boarded an English vessel as a prisoner. You know his end at St. Helena.

"More than seventy thousand men were killed here in that Battle of Waterloo. When you see these fields now, you would scarcely believe that so many men died here."

This account of my father's made a deep impression, and to this day his words stand vividly in my mind.

Waterloo was the end of our trip, and from there we came home.

Where the Battle of Waterloo was Fought.

all—and go to Antwerp, where some friends of mine lived, and where I felt I would be better able to provide for those who were dear to me. My mother was willing enough to let me do as I wished, but she was afraid of the future. I was so young, and it was such a big step for her to leave the city where she had been born.

Nevertheless, after some weeks, we made the decision to go to Antwerp ! I was delighted at the prospect and the days passed rapidly, while I was realizing my dream. And the day came at last when we left Roulers. Before our departure we had visited all our friends, and everybody had wished us good luck. I had been to see the priest of our church, who was also president of the Catholic Association for young men of which I was a member. He had given me much good advice, and had strongly recommended me to become a member of the Catholic Association at Antwerp.

Well, Mother, Sister and I settled in one of the suburbs of Antwerp, and after a few days I found employment in a canning factory there. My Antwerp friends lived in a different suburb, so I did not see much of them, after all. In fact I did not know anybody, and for several months I felt lost in the big city. My only pleasure was my work, in which I was getting on satisfactorily.

I was eighteen when my employer one day sent me to investigate a complaint made by a customer living in a neighboring village. To reach this place I had to take an electric car, and what should I happen to see therein? On a small card pinned to the wall of the car was printed an invitation to all young men to join the Christian Association, which met every Thursday and Sunday evening at a certain address in the Rue Conscience. I was glad to learn this address, because I had kept in mind the recommendation given me by the priest at Roulers to join

the Catholic Young Men's Association at Antwerp. I therefore made a note of the address, and I decided at once to go to the meeting next Thursday.

But let me tell you my experience with the customer who had complained. He was an irritable old man, and he certainly had reason enough to complain now; a large box of canned peas which our firm had sent him had made no end of trouble for him. The case had arrived on the morning of the previous Saturday, and judging by the labels that the goods were what he had ordered of us, he had sold many cans during Saturday afternoon.

And what had happened now? Early the following Monday angry customers had been bringing back opened cans, which contained no peas at all, but tomato soup! To me the matter was simple enough: somewhere in the labelling department a mistake had been made, and this case of soup, destined for

another customer, had been labelled peas. Perhaps the customer who had wanted the soup was having the same kind of trouble with his case of wrongly labelled peas.

It was a hard task for me to pacify the old man, but in the end I succeeded. And I explained to him so vividly about the other different vegetables which we preserved in the canning factory that not only did I prevail upon him to keep the tomatoes, but he gave me a large order for several new lines of preserved goods.

When I returned to the factory, I told the whole story to my employer. After I had finished my recital, he said :

" Robert, how old are you ? "

" Eighteen."

" Well, never mind," he replied, " you are old enough. From to-day you are one of our travelling salesmen."

That promotion doubled my salary. You can imagine how eagerly I rushed home that night to tell Mother, and

how proud and joyous Mother was at the news.

But next Thursday evening I did not forget to go to the Christian Association. I was happy at the thought of again meeting boys of my own age, and of fulfilling my promise to the priest at Roulers to become a member of the association at Antwerp.

At half-past seven I was in the Rue Conscience. I was puzzled by the entrance of the building, because the place was not as big as I had expected, and also because I saw so few boys entering. In the hall I spoke to the Secretary, who was a friendly man. He asked me some questions about where I was born, where I lived, and what I was doing, and he told me that I was welcome among them. He also gave me a little book containing the rules of the association, and said that at eight o'clock they were going to hold a meeting, which I could attend if I wished.

I accepted at once. What I had ex-

pected, however, did not materialize. At Roulers these evening meetings always were devoted to various kinds of games and amusements, such as billiards, cards, draughts, and chess. But what was this? About a dozen boys were seated around a table in the room I entered, and a white-haired gentleman, to whom I was introduced, was presiding. I took my seat at the table, and was given a *Bible:* I never had had one in my hands before. The meeting began with a prayer. Then the President read a chapter from the Gospel of St. John, and explained it to us. All the time I was wondering! Everything was so new to me; to be sure, the lesson was about Jesus, but how different it sounded from the lessons that I had previously learned! And that the words of the President were all true I could feel in my innermost heart.

I went home and told Mother about the meeting. She could not understand it, either; but she said she did not see

any harm in my going there. As long as I was with men and boys speaking about Jesus, no harm would befall me there, she told me.

But the next day on the train, when I was going to Malines to visit some customers of the firm, I found time to read through the little book which the Secretary had given me. Now I understood. It was not a Catholic Association but a Protestant Y. M. C. A. I could not go there any more, I decided; and as soon as I had time that day, I wrote a letter to the Secretary, thanking him for his kindness in admitting me to the meeting the evening before, but telling him that since I was a Catholic, which he surely could not have known, naturally they would not want me any more among them.

On the following evening the Secretary came to my home, and had a long talk with Mother and me. Yes, he had understood from the first that I was a Catholic;

Antwerp Cathedral.

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but did I not want to come again? Had I seen anything wrong at the meeting? Had the other boys made any objection to me because I was a Catholic? But if I liked to come, why should I not do so, for a little while, at least? If after some more meetings I wished to stay away, I was a free man in a free country, and surely they could not prevent me from staying away.

Well, Mother only repeated what she had already said to me, that as long as people at the Y. M. C. A. spoke about Jesus, no harm could come of it. So I promised the Secretary that I would go again.

And I did attend the meetings as often as I could. This step was a turning point in my religious beliefs.

CHAPTER XV

SOME BUSINESS EXPERIENCES

A TRAVELLING salesman in Belgium has a great many facilities for travelling by rail which can be had only in such a small country as ours. Belgium is densely threaded with railways, all owned by the State. As a matter of fact, Belgium has more railways in comparison to its size than any other country in the world. The country is so small that I could leave home each morning on the train for some city in the provinces, do my business there, and be home the same evening; only in exceptional cases did I have to go to the hotel for the night.

But your travelling expenses must be very high, when you use the trains so much, I hear you say, but that is not so. The government issues special railway-

tickets, which are valid for a whole year, and which allow you to travel on all trains to any distance as often as you please. Such a railroad pass costs exactly three hundred and sixty francs, or less than seventy-five dollars, for a whole year; not quite twenty cents a day. Just think of it! I often travelled two hundred miles in a whole day, and my trip would cost less than twenty cents.

That our money is different from yours, you know. Our smallest coin is called a centime, but the value is only one-fifth of one United States cent; in other words, one hundred and twenty-five Belgian centimes is only one quarter of a United States dollar. Our measures and weights are also different; we use the metric system, that is, grams, decigrams, hectograms, and kilos, in weight. One kilo is a little more than two pounds avoirdupois; to be more exact, one hundred and twelve English pounds equal fifty Belgian kilos.

I had my troubles while travelling; but I enjoyed many experiences, and my customers became my friends. The hardest customer I ever had was a man at Ghent. I had been to his store perhaps a dozen times, and I could not even get a word with him, for he would wave his hand at me as soon as I opened the door, signifying that he did not want anything. I could not even bring him to explain why he did not want to trade with us.

One day, while he was waving his hand, as usual, to send me away, I walked into the store and up to the counter behind which he was standing, and said:

"Give me a kilo of your best coffee."

And then his tongue became loosened. Had I come to live in the neighborhood? Did I no longer travel for my firm of dealers in canned vegetables and so on?

I did not give him a direct answer, but letting him take an affirmative answer for granted, I inquired:

"Mr. Vercammen, tell me now, why did you never want to buy any of my goods when I came to sell them?"

"I was told that they were no good," he answered.

"Well, that is singular," I replied. "I just met a friend of mine, who told me you sold the worst coffee in the city."

You should have seen that man's temper flare. What, his coffee no good? It was the best in the city; he sold only the best goods. His store was noted for that fact, and if his coffee was so bad, why did I buy it there?

"Exactly, why do I buy it here?" I repeated. "Because I want to find out if what that fellow said was true. I do not believe everything that is told me, I want to find out myself. It is the same thing with our preserves: you have been told they were no good, but you are now going to give a trial order, and find out for yourself if that is true."

Mr. Vercammen saw the point, gave me a small trial order, and became one of my best customers.

Once I met in the train the traveller for another firm dealing in canned goods, and all the way home he sat boasting of the large orders he had taken that day, of the bigness of his firm, of the superiority of their goods over ours, and so on. As a last straw, he told me that his firm had received a big order to be exported to the Congo. The next day they were going to have driven through the principal streets of Antwerp ten huge wagons laden with the cases for that Congo order, and decorated with posters telling about their goods. That would be a sensational advertisement; I had better stay at Antwerp next day to see the fun.

He had annoyed me all the way with his brag, and when I arrived at the office, I went at once to see the "boss," and told him about the wagons and about a certain little plan I had just conceived. When

he heard about it, he gave me a free hand to do as I liked.

On the next day about twelve o'clock, when the streets were packed with people, surely enough, the ten big vans came from the factory of our competitor, which I had been watching. As long as they were in the factory district of the city, I did not do anything; but once they reached the Meir, that is, the main street, twenty workmen from our factory appeared, each one with a big poster on a board. Two men walked by each wagon, one on each side. On our posters was printed in red, flaring letters this advertisement:

WE DO NOT NEED TO SEND OUR GOODS TO AFRICA.

WE CANNOT MAKE ENOUGH FOR HOME TRADE.

OUR GOODS ARE APPRECIATED RIGHT HERE, NOT IN AFRICA.

The name of our firm was under these statements. And the people laughed and

laughed. It was one of our best advertisements, and it did not cost us much.

There was one representative of another firm who always impressed me very much. He was a big man about forty years old, who went to the best hotels for dinner, and who would never ride in an electric car but took a taxi-cab, or, in the smaller cities, a carriage, to visit his customers. He and I sold the same line of goods, and I felt that I had little chance to do any business, when he was in the vicinity. I was only a mere boy, and he looked down upon me as if I were dust in the street.

One of our regular customers at Bruges had written to our firm that he needed some goods, but before giving his order he wanted especially low quotations. I was sent to interview him, and whom should I see, when I descended from the train at Bruges, but my big competitor going out of the station?

Instinctively I realized that we were

on the same errand, and I felt that my chances were small, if he was first with my customer. Yet what could I do? I saw him step into the only carriage which was to be had, and now he would surely be there before me.

But no! As the carriage moved away, I hopped on the back spring of the carriage and there I sat, like any little boy "hooking" a ride. You should have seen me sitting there, with my back against the carriage, doing my very best to keep my equilibrium.

We arrived safely, and while my big friend stepped out of the carriage and leisurely paid the cabman, I walked briskly into the office, found my customer, and booked the order.

Perhaps it was not quite right to obtain a ride at the expense of another and then get an order away from him, but I was young, eager to advance my employer's interests, and had often been unfairly treated by my large competitor.

CHAPTER XVI

HAPPY YEARS

And now time sped on. I was a traveller, a full-fledged business man, and I was not nineteen years old. Next year was only to be my "lottery year." Since that time the law of compulsory military service has been changed, and every boy in Belgium must become a soldier when he is twenty years old. But fifteen years ago, when I was twenty, only about fifty boys out of each hundred had to enter the army, and these fifty were drawn for the service. If you drew a high number, you were exempt from all military service, but if you drew a low number, it meant service for three years.

As the time for the lottery approached, we lived through anxious days at home.

If I had to become a soldier, what would happen to Mother and Sister? How could they live without my support for three long years?

But we were anxious without reason, because when the actual day for conscription arrived, I drew one of the highest numbers. Picture for yourself with what joy I let my pigeon fly home with the lucky number attached to his foot, and how glad Mother felt when that prompt messenger of good tidings brought her the news!

I kept several carrier-pigeons at home for my amusement. I would often take a couple of them with me on a trip, and when miles away, I would let them fly home with a greeting for Mother and Sister.

Now the pigeon had brought a better message than ever before.

With this care off my shoulders, I worked harder under the canning firm than ever before. My business route

now comprised two provinces, and nearly every fortnight I went to my home town, Roulers, where I renewed acquaintance with many friends of my boyhood.

I was glad now that I had made the decision to go to Antwerp when I did. But it had not all been plain sailing. There were many days when it was a hard fight to get any orders for my goods, and often enough the idea would come to me that other work was easier and better paid. But then Mother reminded me:

"Robert, better a bird in the hand than three in the sky."

So I stuck to my work, and became more and more successful.

When I was twenty-two years old, I met in the train a man whom I had known while we lived in Roulers, but to whom I had never spoken. He was a pleasant man, and we had quite a chat together on all kinds of topics. When we separated at the station he told me

to come to his home the next time I was at Roulers.

This I did about a week later ; as I had to stay over the night on that trip, I was glad of the opportunity to spend the evening out of the hotel. I had supper with his family, and after supper we spoke about religious matters, and it developed that this man was a Protestant. And I, who had lived so many years in the same small town, did not fully know, then, what a Protestant was.

Let me cut things short. I went again and again to his house, and after a while I did not go to see him, but one of his daughters.

A year later I was married.

About this time I saw an opening to begin business for myself, and I built a small factory in a town near Antwerp, called Contich. There I manufactured jelly-powders, cake-flour, custard-powders, and several other articles carried by grocers.

The business acquaintances that I had formed while travelling for my Antwerp employer now stood me in good stead; in fact, they were my biggest asset. All the grocers to whom I had been selling goods for several years had become my friends, and when I told them that I was starting in business for myself, they were all glad to help me by giving me orders.

I well remember my first order. My wife, my mother, and myself packed the goods between us; and I put them into the boxes and mailed them. I had only a very little money to start with, so I had to travel to get orders in the daytime and to prepare each day's orders that night, in order that the goods could be shipped next day. It was strenuous work, but what did I care? Was I not in business for myself now, was I not married, and were we not all happy together? Mother lived in a small house with Sister not far from where my wife and I were

living, and my mother came to help us each day.

Soon our children arrived; first Margaret, then Anneke and the next year, Henry, and the year after that, Robert. After we had been married ten years we had seven children. Walter, Lieseken, and Martha were the last three.

My business had grown with the children. I had built a good-sized factory; I employed twenty-two workmen; and I had two young Germans selling my goods on the road. My own hands were full with the office work. I had also bought a fine house in Contich.

CHAPTER XVII

THE OUTBREAK OF THE WAR

This was my life until the fateful year, 1914, was reached. We were happy at home, and I can say with truth that all the people in Belgium were happy. They were a quiet, industrious folk, transacting business from all over the world, welcoming the citizens of all nations, and being friends with all men.

That the Germans also were our friends before the war, everybody knows. Just think that at Brussels more than eight thousand Germans lived, at Antwerp more than fifteen thousand, and so it was all over Belgium. We were glad to have them in our midst, and had learned to appreciate their perseverance and business ability.

When at the end of July, therefore,

rumors of war were spreading, when a wave of seeming madness swept over Europe, all of us in Belgium were quiet, and felt that if war should come, we, at least, as in the seventies, would have nothing to do with it. Were not all nations our friends, and had not all these friends given their solemn word that Belgium was a neutral country, and that they would for all time respect that neutrality?

And then came the crash, the thunderbolt. Germany declares war upon us, because we keep our given word! Do you feel that thrill of indignation which went through all of us? Do you wonder at the refusal of our glorious King to accept the Kaiser's proposition? King Albert knows his people; he knows that his soldiers will fight as heroes to the last man; that Belgium may be overrun by the enemy, but that it never will be conquered.

To understand the love of the Belgians

for their King, Queen, and Princes, you must realize the love of the King for his people,—a love which has been evident in all the circumstances of his reign. Did the King and Queen not always help when there was distress? In 1912 the dykes broke through near Antwerp, and the Scheldt River flooded a long stretch of territory, causing disaster to many of my countrymen. The calamity happened during the night of the autumnal equinox, and early the next morning the King was there, directing the work of salvation, while the Queen was speaking consoling words to the mothers and children.

How the Queen's heart must bleed now! She is a Bavarian princess, and all the members of her own family are fighting against the country of which she is Queen. Since Liège she has worn a simple mourning dress without a single ornament; she has been at work each day in the Red Cross hospitals, helping everywhere, wash-

ing with her own royal hands the bleeding feet of the soldiers. She now is called "Mother" by our soldiers, and she may be proud of that name. Think of it, is there any honor more to be desired by a queen than to be called the mother of her people?

But the horror and the pity of it all! Let me tell you a little of what war means by relating the experience of a Brussels family. A friend of mine, the minister of the Evangelical Church at Brussels, has a son of twenty. This boy was a soldier in the Belgian army; he fought in the trenches at Liège, he was in the battles of Diest and Louvain, and at last, with the rest of the army, he was driven back to Antwerp.

Just before Antwerp was attacked, I received a letter from his father telling me that for weeks he had not had word from his son, and that he himself could not get through the German lines. He wondered if I could go to make a search

for his son in the Fifth Infantry Regiment.

Of course I tried at once to locate the boy, and finally learned that the Fifth Regiment was at the fort of Wavre St. Cathérine, only six miles from where we lived. So I set out that very morning. It was a long walk, and the booming of the German cannons in the south never ceased. That Monday the Germans were attacking Lierre and Duffel, and the farther I went, the more did I realize how terrible this war was.

The road was swarming with fugitives: it was a never-to-be-forgotten sight to watch these poor people trying to get away, all staggering under loads of such things as they could take away with them in their haste. I saw old men pushing carts laden with children; young women, many of them carrying young babies in their arms; and old women with shuffling feet.

In the ditch by the side of the road sat

A Line of Refugees.

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a young girl; she may have been twenty, not over. She held a tiny baby pressed against her breast, and she looked so dejected that I spoke to her. She came from Lierre, more than nine miles away, she told me; her baby had been born the day before her soldier-husband had been killed at Namur. It was a warm day, but she felt cold. A peasant with a three-wheeled cart, drawn by a cow, happened by, and he helped me to put the young woman and her child on top of the furniture on his cart. And so they went away, I wonder where.

But to return to my search for my friend's son. I did not find him at the fort. His comrades told me that he had been wounded in the battle of Eppeghem, and that he must now be in the hospital at Boom. It was another long walk, but I wanted to see the boy; and so on I went to Boom, until I came to the hospital, a big house with many Red Cross flags on top.

And here I found Paul in bed. A piece of shrapnel had struck him in the back, and his spinal column was broken. He could not speak ; he could not move ; only his eyes were eloquent, and they burned like two fires. When I spoke to him of his mother, of his father, and of home, I saw one single tear come into his eyes, and I could understand his thirsty longing to see once more the faces of these dear-beloved ones, and to forget the awful horror of battle. And he could not say a word.

Oh ! the pity of it all ! For there were so many other young men in that big white room—all badly wounded, some with arms gone, some with half a face blown away. They, too, had mothers; some had wives and children. Oh, the deadly quietness of such a hospital room ! Where is Paul now ? Does he still live, and will my friends ever see their son again ?

But let us leave the warriors alone and

see how the civilians fared. When the war began, all business came to a standstill. The railways were in the hands of the military authorities, and transportation was to be had only for the troops. Travelling by rail was either totally impossible, or else it took a whole day to go fifteen or twenty miles. Transportation of food, coal, and all other industrial products was entirely out of the question, unless the things were for the army. All private business was put aside. The army and the defense of the mother-land was now the only object of the nation. Remember that this was at the outset of the war, when the Germans were still counting their dead before Liège.

As a consequence of these conditions, practically all the working people could not earn a penny after the beginning of the war. What this means in a country of low wages,—where in times of peace the wages vary between forty and eighty

cents a day,—any thrifty mother will understand. We are of a country where we still hold the old belief that children are given us as a blessing; nearly all the families have three or four children, and those with seven to twelve children are not at all uncommon.

All these small wage-earners were in need of help from the first days of the war; there were municipal kitchens in every city and village of Belgium, where the poor could get two pounds of bread in the morning and a large bowl of bean soup at noon. I will not tell you the length of the lines of waiting men and women at these places; you would tax me with exaggeration.

And then came that fleeing from one village to another, seeking safety which was not be found anywhere!

CHAPTER XVIII

OUR MARCH FROM CONTICH TO ANTWERP

But, I hear you say, "How about your own family?"

When we left our village of Contich, which lies between Antwerp and Malines, the heavy German artillery was booming all day long. For weeks preparations had been made to defend Antwerp bravely. The forts were ready: barbed wire was laid everywhere; deep trenches were dug between the forts, and all the houses, trees—everything—for half a mile in front of the forts were cut away and destroyed, so that there was nothing left but an open field, where the enemy could find no shelter for their attack.

Although it was in the heart of all the soldiers to defend the city to the last man, we knew that if a German attack should

come, we should not be able to hold the city. Our field army, which was to defend the trenches, was tired to death. Since Liège its men had been constantly in the field; in fact nearly all of the soldiers had been in ten battles. And it is a nerve-destroying thing to know that however hard you fight, you cannot hold out in the end against the overwhelming masses of the enemy. In all the battles where they have fought, the Belgians have shown that they fight without fear and with a courage indescribable; but after each seemingly victorious battle, they have had to retreat the next day.

From the first week at Liège, we knew that we could not stand alone, that if the advance of the Kaiser's troops was to be checked, help must come. Each day help had been promised to our soldiers; and each day they fought more fiercely for the independence of our dearly loved Belgium. But when week after week

Wounded Belgian Soldier telling his Children of the Thrilling Fight with the Germans at Liege.

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they had to fight alone, when no French or British troops came to help them repulse the Germans, the knowledge of having an impossible task to perform took the heart out of our soldiers.

I was at home that fateful Monday, when exactly at eight o'clock in the morning the first heavy boom was heard in the distance. The German attack upon Antwerp and upon the fort of Waelhem had begun. And on it kept throughout the whole day, two boomings every minute. We were quite at ease, nevertheless, because we felt so sure that it would be a long time before these forts would be destroyed, and by that time the oft-promised help from England would surely have come. Therefore, when at night the cannonading ceased, we spoke of the attack lightly. We did not believe that the Germans would use their guns again; we supposed that this attack had been only a feint, and that

our forts of Waelhem and Wavre St. Cathérine had caused them heavy losses that day.

But the next morning we were thrown out of bed. At six o'clock the firing had started again, and this time it sounded much louder and nearer. Oh, that awful Tuesday, when the first cupola of the fort Waelhem was smashed by the heavy shells from the German guns, shall I ever forget it? That never-ending line of Red Cross automobiles, carrying the wounded Belgian soldiers, the pitiful groans coming from the powder-blackened lips, the dreadful sight of the poor boys with atrocious wounds,—limbs, feet, noses gone,—oh, it was horrible! Those moans will always resound in my ears.

And when the evening came again, and the people gathered in the streets, according to their custom since the war began, to talk over the ever new topic of the day's events, the ease and tranquillity of the day before were gone. We knew that

once the forts were taken, the end would soon come, unless England or France came to our aid. And we also knew that they had their hands full.

Another morning, and Wednesday came. The attack was raging everywhere now: Waelhem, Willebroeck, Lierre, Duffel—all the forts—were belching fire. We did not sleep much that night, for another song had startled us,—the *clack, clack, clack* of the machine-guns. We realized that the fight was at closer quarters now.

In the morning we saw that awful procession on the road again, peasants with furniture-carts, men wheeling bicycles laden with two sacks of clothes, one hanging on each side, women crying, children weeping,—an endless procession of misery. Duffel is on fire, Waerloos is shelled, Lierre is on fire. When is Contich's time coming?

I had not long to wait for the answer. I was at the outskirts of the village when

I saw the first big shell explode with a noise like a train running at full speed. The pieces struck the ground about one hundred and fifty yards from where I was standing. The crash was terrific. We had crouched instinctively; and our eyes were blinded as if by lightning. And then the whole village began to run.

With the German cannon in the south and east spreading ruin and destruction and with the Scheldt to be crossed in the west, the only way open to us was at the north. This was in the direction of Antwerp and Holland.

That tramp along the ten long miles of road leading from Contich to Antwerp, where I hoped to be safe, can you imagine what it was like? Just think of shells falling behind us; think of that long, dusty road jammed with carts and cows, with people, young and old, all going the same way to the north, with army automobiles rushing past in the middle

of the road to Antwerp, and horsemen, soldiers, and cannons travelling south. Let your imagination paint for you all that indescribable chaos of vehicles and men.

Now imagine that you have five children with you, the oldest only ten years, the others seven, three, and two, and that you carry the youngest, a baby of nine months, in your arms; and then take that ten-mile tramp with us.

Is it to be wondered that children were lost, that wives were left exhausted by the roadside, and that endless miseries were suffered in such a flight? We had formerly watched this wretched procession; we had looked on for many days when the citizens of the villages farther south had been fleeing. But now we were on the road ourselves, driven from our homes like sheep going to the market!

When we started, I knew that this long march could never be accomplished in

one stretch, but that if we were to keep together, and reach our goal at all, we must not hurry, but must take our time. Every fifteen or twenty minutes, therefore, or as soon as the children told us that they were tired, I called a halt. We did not listen to our neighbors' urging us to go on, but quietly squatted down in the ditch by the roadside, petting the children. In their innocence, the children made fun of the never-ceasing booming of the big guns, which now made a louder noise for them than the fireworks at the village fair.

Then after a while we would march on along the road, through other villages, Edeghem, Bouchout, Vremde, where the inhabitants looked with commiseration. They felt safe enough that day, but they were waiting, as we had waited, for the fatal hour, when they also would have to flee from the coming horrors.

Should you ask me how long it took us to reach Antwerp, I could never tell

A Soldier and his Homeless Family.
Refugees at Ostend.

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you. We left Contich in the morning, and now it was as pitch-dark as only a city can be where all lights are extinguished at eight o'clock in the evening, and where with the dark all activity stops.

We slept that night in an empty room of a house in the Rue Bréderode. We had no beds, we had eaten nothing since the morning, but we were grateful for the shelter. We just fell down and slept. If you do not sleep well at night, just try a ten-mile walk on an empty stomach, with a baby in your arms and two other children clinging to your coat. You will sleep well after that!

CHAPTER XIX

OUR FLIGHT FROM ANTWERP

And so passed the next few days, with good tidings every morning and bad tidings every evening, with that anxious waiting for news and for the morning and evening papers; extra editions were not allowed. It was a terribly long week.

Then came the visit of Lord Churchill and the promise that the British troops would soon be in Belgium to help. There was joy again.

But each day the outlook was worse. The German troops had taken Waelhem. Now they had crossed the River Nethe at Lierre, and were advancing on Antwerp.

They had not crossed the river without a struggle. It took them a whole day to get the first man over, and the river was filled with the bodies of their soldiers.

That night at Ruppelmonde, where the Nethe flows into the Scheldt, the stream of blood tinted the sandy, yellow waters of the Scheldt with long red streaks.

But the end would soon come. A proclamation from the governor, stating that the city would be shelled within twenty-four hours, was on the walls, as a warning to all those who wished to flee. The way to the north was still open. Those who did not want to leave the city must take to their cellars with food and drink for five days.

And the people fled. That day two hundred thousand citizens, at least, left the city, all going to the north, some in boats from the river piers, most of them on foot.

We wished to stay another day, for it was no use to try to keep together in these thronged masses of escaping people. We had made our preparations for the night; we had fitted the cellar comfortably with straw; we had bedclothes for

the children, and food, water, and candles. It was fun that night to go to bed in the cellar; this ever-changing mode of living was a continuous treat for our children.

It was a short night, and with the first glimmer of dawn came the report of the first shell bursting over the city. The street where we were staying is situated in the southern part of the city, and nearly all the shells fell there. The morning wore on, and although from time to time we heard the sound of feet rushing past the house and of shells bursting not so very far away, we kept to our cellar like rats in a hole.

At first the shells burst only occasionally, but later in the day the intervals between explosions were shorter.

In the Rue Bréderode and in the adjoining Rue Anselmo there were many citizens who had taken to their cellars. About noon there came a cry, "Fire! Fire!" I went to the front door, and

saw the street filled with smoke, and the houses at the end of the street on fire.

That was the end of our stay in the cellar. We crept out, and followed the other running citizens. As if the houses could be any protection, everybody kept close to the walls.

It was a tedious walk, with many stops. The whole southern part of the city was on fire; dense black smoke, coming from the burning oil-tanks, overhung the whole city; and all the time the shells kept on bursting right and left, tearing holes in the houses, and crumbling the walls to pieces.

That we ever reached the pontoon wharf at the Scheldt seems a wonder now. The pontoon wharf was packed full with people who all wanted to get away by tugs and other small river craft sailing for Holland.

After more than three hours of waiting we were crammed standing, with over a thousand others, into the hold of a coal-

barge. A cry of hope went up when at length we felt the barge move on. All that we could see from the port-holes was a piece of the sky, for the holds of these coal-barges are more than twelve feet deep.

It was night when we landed at Hansweert among thousands and thousands of other refugees. Hansweert is only a tiny village, and no accommodation was to be had anywhere that night. Yet again we could only thank God for our preservation and for the help He had granted us.

We walked on to Vlake, only a short distance away, and found a train in the station. There was no question of buying tickets; everybody could travel free in those days. We boarded the train and three hours later we were at Rotterdam.

I must not forget to thank the kind women at the way-station of Roesendael who gave us bottles of milk for our children and sea-biscuits for ourselves. Neither can I forget that young mother

Refugees leaving Antwerp.

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on the train with an apparently sleeping baby in her arms. During the whole long ride she did not say a word, but kept looking at her child. Not until we were nearing Rotterdam did we see that her child was dead.

At Rotterdam more than one hundred thousand refugees had already received accommodation, and there were no more lodgings to be had. So we were sent on to a neighboring village, Overschie, where we arrived in the early hours of the morning. Our reception there was most cordial, and our worst trouble was now over.

CHAPTER XX

WE COME TO THE UNITED STATES

At Overschie preparations had been made for the reception of the refugees, and there were one hundred and thirty-nine of us all together in a big barn, where we slept on straw. The food given us in the morning was good enough, but we could not stay long in such a situation with so many little children.

On the next day more refugees came to Overschie, and as it happened, some people from our own village came. They had left Contich two days later than we had. From them we learned that two shells had burst through the roof of our house and left it in ruins: it was now only a tangled heap of stones, wood, glass, and broken furniture. The factory was destroyed by fire, although they

could not tell how this had happened. But only the four walls were now standing. All these were Job's tidings for us. The work of many years was gone, and our hopes of building up a good business in Contich were shattered.

At the beginning of the summer holidays we had sent two of our children to England to visit a friend of ours in London. The war had come in the meantime, and Anneke and Henry were still at London, while we were refugees in Holland, all our earthly possessions gone.

After much talking and deliberation, my wife and I came to the decision that the best thing we could do was to come to the United States, where my wife had a brother living. Mother, who feared the ocean trip, would go to England, and stay for a while with Anneke and Henry there, and join us in America the following summer.

We had to stay at Overschie twelve

days, until there was a boat sailing for America, and these twelve days there in the barn in the company of all these other refugees, with news coming from Belgium that Antwerp had fallen, and that the Germans were overrunning the whole country, were sad days; and neither my wife nor I will ever forget them.

Finally the steamer sailed. We left Holland at night, and no one on board dared to sleep that first night for fear we should strike a mine, as so many ships had done in the last few days. But happily this calamity did not occur. We saw the British fleet when we passed through the Channel, and we were glad to see the last of the Scilly Islands the next day. It meant that the war was behind us, and that we should see a free and peaceful country within a few days.

We landed in New York on the third of November after a rough passage of

fourteen days. We have been in this country four months now, and our reception has been most sympathetic everywhere. All the people to whom I have spoken about the war have expressed admiration for the Belgians and their valorous King.

We wondered at first to see everybody at work and business going on as usual. We had forgotten about that in the last months. And then to see all these men mingling together; and to have only one class on the railway and the street cars, whereas in Europe we had two or three, or even four different classes of railway carriages, thus drawing a sharp line between men of different conditions. And here all are together,—the working man sitting on the same seat as the employer. It is ideal liberty.

But do you not go too far sometimes? Do you not misunderstand your own ideal of liberty and equality?

We had supper one night at the home

of a family here with whom we have become friendly. These friends have only one child, a little daughter five years old. At supper her mother said to her:

"Mary, will you please fetch me that book there on the chair?"

And the answer was: "Do it yourself!"

At this retort her father burst out laughing, and the mother went herself to fetch the book.

My heart and that of my wife were oppressed. We had held our breath at the answer of the child, waiting for the coming punishment, but it did not come; and we understood then that these kind people were educating their child on a principle of absolute liberty.

I would not speak of it now, if I thought that it was a single instance of American training. But in the short time we have been here, we have seen so many children utterly disregarding the words of their parents that we are

obliged to infer that it is not unusual to let children behave that way.

We have not been here long enough to appreciate the good points which there may be in such an education. Nevertheless, although we are full of admiration for the many fine traits we have observed in the citizens of the United States, we feel that your ideal of liberty is abused when children are allowed to do whatever they like. True liberty is founded upon obedience to all the principles of truth and love; and for children liberty starts with prompt obedience to the wishes of their parents, in which they should find these ideals of truth and love fulfilled.

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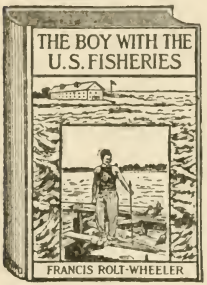

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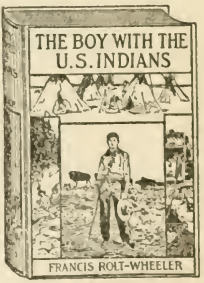

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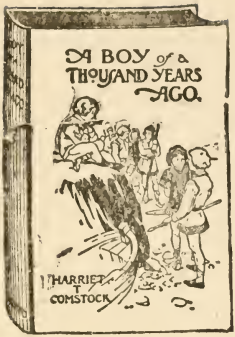

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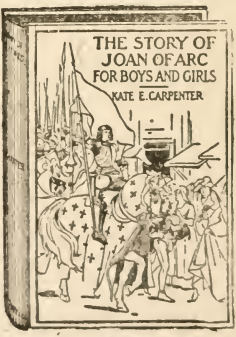

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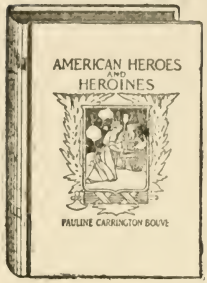

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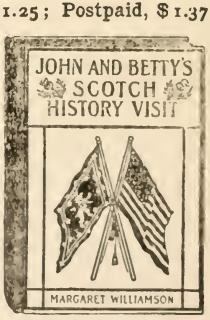

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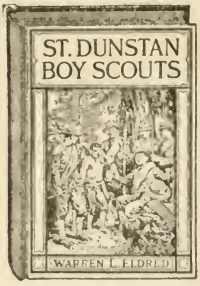

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